

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 142

By Turner M

A RESOLUTION to urge the Federal Communications Commission and the U. S. Department of Justice to investigate the use of federal funds to hire members of the media to promote the Executive Branch's legislation and initiatives.

WHEREAS, in the past few weeks the American public has learned that their federal tax dollars have been used by federal government agencies, at the behest of federal government officials, to hire private media journalists and commentators to promote new proposals and initiatives of the Bush Administration; and

WHEREAS, equally as troubling is the failure of those individual journalist and media members who received payment(s) to disclose that fact to their respective readers, their listeners and the viewing public, according to published reports; and

WHEREAS, President George W. Bush has called on his Cabinet to end the practice stating that, "Our agenda ought to be able to stand on its own two feet"; and

WHEREAS, no less authority than the First Amendment to the United States Constitution contained in the Bill of Rights addresses "Freedom of the Press", and the American public is deserving of straightforward, honest and unbiased reporting and coverage of issues by the American media; and

WHEREAS, public scrutiny has further revealed the questionability of these contracts in light of the fact that it is unlawful for the federal government to engage in activities that could easily be perceived as "domestic propaganda"; and

WHEREAS, the General Accountability Office has requested materials to investigate the payment of \$241,000 by the Department of Education to commentator Armstrong Williams to promote education policies, including No Child Left Behind; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Communications Commission has initiated an investigation to determine if Mr. Williams broke the law by failing to disclose this financial arrangement during his on air broadcast(s); and

WHEREAS, the Department of Health and Human Services has now disclosed that it paid two nationally prominent media figures, Mike McManus and Maggie Gallagher, to promote the Bush administration's marriage initiative; and

WHEREAS, members of Congress are now requesting a comprehensive review of all public relations and advertising contracts signed since 2001, which contracts according to some reports, have increased dramatically during the Bush Administration; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that this body support a through investigation and review of these incidents to ensure the appropriate use of our federal tax dollars and to restore honor to our sacred First Amendment; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby urge the Federal Communications Commission and the U. S. Department of Justice to investigate each occurrence of media personnel being hired by a federal agency to promote the agenda of the Bush Administration, including the Marriage initiative, No Child Left Behind and the Social Security reform initiative.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that appropriate copies of this resolution be prepared and sent to the U. S. Department of Justice, the members of the Federal Communications Commission, and every member of the Tennessee Congressional Delegation.